



Current Blend Community Coordinator Courtney Knies and Huntingburg Mayor Denny Spinner believe that Dubois County has all the pieces for entrepreneurship; it's a matter of bringing it together.

BUSINESS MIX

Current Blend Offers Good Start

By Rebecca Patrick

Huntingburg, Indiana is a charming city of just a little more than 6,000 residents.

As a matter of fact, when I was there recently, a piano instrumental to Phantom of the Opera's "Music of the Night" played from speakers high above a street corner.

But don't let that fool you. It's also a center for something truly innovative.

On historic 4th Street sits Current Blend, a co-working environment that is helping foster entrepreneurship in the Dubois County community and surrounding area.

Current Blend is home to those who want to connect with entrepreneurs and start-ups to get ideas and network, as well as for people who want an office space instead of working from home.

From Honolulu to Huntingburg

Aaron Begle fits both descriptions to a T.

He grew up on the Dubois and Spencer county lines, and later spread his wings to Hawaii – where last June he started a video production and aerial imaging company.

When the market for that work became "saturated and limited", Begle returned with his rebranded Hele Productions.

But he felt like he was spinning his wheels, trying to make things happen from his parents' basement.

Things changed in March when Begle became a member of Current Blend.

"When I moved back from Hawaii, I had no idea that this place existed," Begle admits. "I operated my business there out of a very similar co-work space/incubator and was thrilled when I found out that little Dubois County could offer me the same opportunity!"

"Being at Current Blend has given me a professional workspace to meet clients, network and really just grow my business. I have met many wonderful individuals here that have gone out of their way to help me succeed. It has truly been a blessing," he declares.

One of those mentors is Ray Niehaus, director of the Vincennes University Campus Center of Technology, Innovation and Manufacturing in Jasper. He is also a Current Blend board member.

"Ray played an instrumental role in helping me get my business off the ground in Indiana," Begle shares. "I met him for the first time here in March, and he has been introducing me to potential clients and helping me garner new business since day one."

Hele Productions' customers range from couples at weddings, to advertising and marketing agencies for commercial videos to school corporations for workshops.

"My primary focus is on capturing aerial video footage, but I also like to help train the next generation of drone pilots by offering workshops and drone training as often as possible," Begle notes.

Opening for an app

When I spoke with local resident Tim Brewer in late May, he and his son had been Current Blend tenants for a month. The lure of collaboration and wanting an environment where they can stay focused is what brought them there.

They are working on a new technology for the real estate industry. It's an app, called VillaPar, that helps with the home matching process between the buyer and seller. (Villa is Latin for house; para is Latin for match.)



Aaron Begle is an ongoing Current Blend success story, His burgeoning business uses drones to capture aerial photography. Begle also provides drone training, including for young students like at the Drone Exploration Workshop at Perry Central schools.

Brewer says it will guide parties through the “accepted offer process, the inspections, appraisals – really all the way to the point of taking it to a title company.”

The goal is to streamline the experience and make it more buyer-centric.

One example could be a homebuyer is in a neighborhood on a Saturday afternoon looking at a property when they notice another is also on sale. The app could connect the buyer and seller directly to set up a viewing right on the spot.

But Brewer stresses that the technology should be helpful to real estate agents as well.

“It will allow them to be at multiple properties, if you will, by freeing them up to focus on the more full-service, higher-touch needs of the higher-priced properties that are harder to sell.”

After only weeks at the co-working space, a lot has been accomplished: further technology development, web site planning and deciding to use Begle’s Hele Productions for video needs.

That connection with Begle underscores what a difference it can make working out of a dynamic environment.

“When you feel the energy and the passion from other individuals here that are working on their particular activities, then you feel the excitement, you feel the passion to continue driving on. It is a collaboration across the board,” Brewer enthuses.

Currently, he is focused on leveraging his spot in the co-working space with a local builder. “Developing that synergy is very much part of our strategy with the pilot (app). We believe we’re pretty close.”

Coming into its own

A T-shirt company and taxi cab service are among the other businesses that started in Current Blend – both have since graduated on to their own successes.

Looking back, Huntingburg Mayor Denny Spinner recalls, “We really didn’t know what to expect or how it would be utilized. Every community has their own take. But we thought it would fit right into the DNA of what Dubois County is all about.

“There’s always been a strong entrepreneurial spirit in our county – witness the industries that have started here and grown and continued to support us.”

One of those is technology consultant Matrix Integration, whose CEO, Brenda Stallings, is the president of Current Blend’s board of directors.

“We’re so excited about it . . . from where it was two years ago when it opened (in May) to now. We’ve had 50 members go through the

facility in total. Today, we have 18. And others come in and use it periodically,” she shares.

“It’s really a mixture of members and also people that we’ve allowed to just pay a three-month fee.”

There’s also room for those just passing through – like students and visitors – who need a space.

Current Blend resides in a building originally owned by OFC Brands, the top employer in Huntingburg. The property now belongs to the city and sits on the spot where the business district meets the Main Street Park project, which is expected to be completed next summer.

“It was a natural fit for our co-share space to be in that environment,” Spinner remarks.

And the increased activity expected in the area may also help with Current Blend’s member occupancy goal. If it hits 20 members and maintains those for 90 days, the local economic development group will kick in more money, Stallings says.



New tenants Tim Brewer and his son Jacob have their VillaPar app moving right along thanks in part to the focus, connections and collaboration they’ve received by being at Current Blend.

“If we can sustain consistently 20 to 25 members, we would be happy with that.”

Next level

Adding members and getting to know them – as well as spreading the word and educating folks about the facility – are among the main reasons Courtney Knies was hired in April as the community coordinator.

Knies is part-time, working 20 hours a week on average.

Ironically, she had previously been a member of Current Blend when she was between jobs. “I was more motivated here than sitting at home on my couch!”

Spinner and Stallings both believe having a designated point of contact will be a turning point.

“Volunteer boards do great work, but they can only do so much. Now that we have Courtney on board, I think we’re going to see some great strides made.” Spinner predicts.

Stallings agrees: “Courtney comes to our (monthly board) meetings and we help her prioritize, and she does the leg work to make things happen.

Staging more events at Current Blend, which will also create a higher profile in the community, is high on the list.

Stallings put together a coding class for sixth and seventh grade girls from Southridge Middle School. Blended Coders 2.0 is in the works for September.

“Matrix Integration donated 10 Chromebooks, a big screen TV with stand and we had two volunteers; they both teach robotics. I couldn’t have been happier,” Stallings offers.



Knies wants Current Blend to get to the point where its “connected to the greater entrepreneurial ecosystem – to be part of the conversations that are happening regionally and statewide.”

Adds Spinner, “It was great exposing them to that environment and to a career they might not have thought about as a middle-schooler.”

Knies sums up the desire – no matter the age, “We want entrepreneurship to be a dinner conversation in Dubois County.”

They mayor believes that’s starting to gain traction.

“(Current Blend) is just really becoming known to our community. As we focus more on that outreach from Courtney’s position, we’re going to generate additional interest that we can’t even imagine right now.”

RESOURCES: Aaron Begle, Hele Productions, at www.heleproductions.com | Tim Brewer, VillaPar, at www.villapar.com | Courtney Knies, Current Blend, at www.currentblend.com | Mayor Denny Spinner at www.huntingburg-in.gov | Brenda Stallings, Matrix Integration, at www.matrixintegration.com

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